Engraving by Venturini (1685): Fountain of Bacchus in a grotto by the Oval Fountain which was originally called the Grotto of Venus and symbolized profane love as opposed to chastity symbolized by the Grotto of Diana. In the central niche of this fountain was a Venus like the Capitoline statue with two little cupids and geese nearby. After the death of Cardinal Ippolito, probably in the time of Cardinal Alessandro, the Venus was replaced by the Bacchus and the two putti and geese were placed on the Fountain of the Swans in the lower section of the garden.

This dedication is the key to the main symbolic scheme of the garden: the Labors of Hercules (related to the efforts of the Cardinal to level the mountain of Tivoli) and that of the golden apples of the Hesperides (which appeared on the coat-of-arms of the House of d'Este) under the protection of the eagle). On the other hand, Hercules was beloved by the whole d'Este family who, imitating the legendary monarchs of Antiquity, had traced their origins back to Hercules and Galatea.

The statues of Hercules were placed along the garden's main axis: a gigantic Hercules holding a club stood in the great niche behind the Fountain of the Dragons, another giant one in the upper grotto depicted him as an old man reclining., while a third one, showing him with the boy-hero Telephus was placed, in keeping with the axis of the others, in another grotto higher up. The symbolism is centered upon and develops from the Fountain of the Dragons: here is the crossroads that leads to either virtue (Grotto of Diana) or else vice (Grotto of Venus). The triumph of virtue was alluded to by the statues of Achilles and Hercules (immortality and victory over vice) placed on the main staircase.

The Fountain of the Dragons and the niche with the statue of Hercules recall the venture of the hero who managed to steal the golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides right from under the dragon's nose. The grotto with Venus leaving the bath symbolizes profane love and the fountain with Diana,